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ABSTRACT

This study analyzes the reaction essays of 24 elementary preservice teachers who read and discussed the same case. The preservice teachers were in two different sections of the same special topics course. Care was taken to balance the sections as closely as possible by age, ethnicity, and major areas. Graduate discussion leaders were chosen to balance the program area (one from educational leadership and one from school counseling/human resources) and ethnicity. Section A was led by two females, one Caucasian and the other Hispanic; Section B was led by two males, a Caucasian and an African American. The discussion leaders were given an established format to follow, which included smaller group discussions, as well as large group discussion. The response essays of the preservice teachers were analyzed using qualitative methods. Content analysis established emergent categories and patterns. These categories and patterns, as well as the type of language used, were analyzed to determine if any differences existed between the responses from different sections. Despite a variety of responses within each section, distinct pattern differences in the overall responses of the preservice teachers in each section were evident. Essays from section A, as a group, exhibited greater generalization from the case to the preservice teachers' practice and field experiences, a greater focus on teacher behaviors and their effect, and evidence of more changes in attitude, while essays from section B, overall, showed a greater emphasis on possible causes of the case problem, a tendency to not generalize beyond the case to either principles of practice or their own field experiences, and less evidence of a change in attitude. One factor that may have contributed to the differences in the two sections was the gender of the section leaders. (Contains 13 references.) (Author/ND)

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Running head: ACCOUNTING FOR OUTCOMES

Accounting for Outcomes in Case Discussions

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Paper presented at the

Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association

San Francisco, CA

April, 1995

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Abstract

This study analyzes the reaction essays of twenty-four elementary preservice teachers who read and discussed the same case. The preservice teachers were in two different sections of the same special topics course. Care was taken to balance the sections as closely as possible by age, ethnicity, and major areas. Graduate discussion leaders were chosen to balance program area (one from educational leadership and one from school counseling/human resources) and ethnicity. Discussion leaders were given an established format to follow, which included smaller group discussions, as well as large group discussion. The response essays of the preservice teachers were analyzed using qualitative methods. Content analysis established emergent categories and patterns. These categories and patterns, as well as the type of language used, were analyzed to determine if any differences existed between the responses from different sections. Despite a variety of responses within each section, distinct pattern differences in the overall responses of the preservice teachers in each section were evident. Essays from section A, as a group, exhibited greater generalization from the case to the preservice teachers' practice and their field experiences, a greater focus on teacher behaviors and their effect, and evidence of more changes in attitude, while essays from section B, overall, showed a greater emphasis on possible causes of the case problem, a tendency to not generalize beyond the case to either principles of practice, or their own field experiences, and less evidence of a change in attitude. One factor that may have contributed to the differences in the two sections was the gender of the section leaders. Section A was led by female doctoral students, while section B was led by male doctoral students.

Background

Proponents of case-based teaching methods note a number of anticipated positive outcomes stemming from case analysis and discussion, but data to identify actual outcomes is in short supply. This study addresses two questions related to outcomes of case-based teaching: 1) Can common procedures for case discussions promote common outcomes across discussion sections; and 2) What factors other than discussion procedures might account for differences in outcomes between sections.

Shulman (1993) suggests that cases are analogous to manipulatives used to promote mathematical learning in young children, in that cases provide concrete representations of experiences and abstractions. He argues that experience must be represented in some form in order to be understood, that it will be understood more fully and deeply if it can be represented in a variety of ways, and that it must be understood in some depth if it is to serve as the basis for learning and development. Thus, analysis and discussion of a well-developed case in a university course could prompt a prospective teacher to recall and describe an initially unexamined similar classroom experience. Instructional, managerial, or social development principles identified as relevant in discussion of the original case could then lead to new insights about the "real world" experience. In this way case-based teaching might build on situated knowledge to promote broader understanding of principles of practice.

In one of the relatively few studies documenting outcomes of preservice teachers' case discussions, Morine-Dershimer (1993) noted the impact of discussion procedures on outcomes. In classes where students met part of the time in small groups for independent discussion and analysis, contrasted with completely teacher-directed discussion classes, there was more complex processing of information about the case, and more framing of what was learned in terms of general principles of practice.

Building on these two sources, this study identified and tested discussion procedures that might be expected to encourage preservice students to relate their own classroom experiences to a case being analyzed, and promote complex processing of information, including consideration of relevant principles

of practice.

Description of the Sections

The reaction papers of elementary preservice teachers in two sections of a special multicultural/health topics class were compared. The sections were designed to be as consistent as possible. Both sections read and analyzed the same case of a young man named Alston (Sears, 1993). The case was written to cover most of the student's school career and used many quotes from the student to tell his story.

Alston, the case subject, grew up in a small, Southern town, "where everyone knew what everyone did," and "As far as the eye could see, there were aunts, grandmothers, uncles, and grandfathers." Alston's family life was not a positive experience. His father was verbally and physically abusive, as was his older brother. In school, Alston was an unmotivated student who daydreamed and failed to turn in homework. By third grade he was close to failing. He was a loner because peers constantly harassed him for being different and effeminate, calling him a "sissy." A vivid imagination helped Alston escape his unhappy circumstances. School personnel only complicated Alston's problems by failing to address his poor academic performance and emotional needs. Some personnel even added their own form of humiliation to those of his peers. Several important events happened during the 5th grade. Alston's father died, and Alston was moved into a higher group with a teacher who took an interest in him. She publicly defended Alston from the harassment of his peers, and encouraged him to work to his potential. Despite the fact that conditions worsened to their former levels the following year when Alston was moved back to his previous group, Alston's 5th grade teacher had made a lasting impression on him. Throughout junior and senior high school Alston continued to be harassed by his schoolmates because of his developing homosexuality. His academic performance, however, continued to improve, thanks to Ms. Langston's influence. Thus, within the complexity of this case, with all its variables and longitudinal focus, there was

the opportunity to develop what Shulman (1986) refers to as strategic knowledge, used when a "teacher confronts particular situations or problems, whether theoretical, practical, or moral, where principles collide and no simple solution is possible" (p. 13).

To provide different perspectives and familiarize preservice teachers with the support services schools provide, each discussion section had two leaders, a doctoral student in school counseling and a doctoral student in school administration. Diverse perspectives were also encouraged with the two leaders of each section being different ethnicities. Section A was led by two females, one Caucasian and the other Hispanic, while section B was led by two males, a Caucasian and African American. The difference in gender of discussion leaders was not planned, but resulted from class schedules and times of graduate student availability.

The preservice teachers in this study were elementary majors who comprised a subset of two different sections of the same special topics discussion course. Section A had twenty-two students in elementary and special education program areas. Section B had eighteen students in elementary, special education, and secondary program areas. Each section included a few males and minorities. In order to eliminate program area as one possible factor influencing reactions to the case in this study, only essays of the twelve elementary majors in each section were analyzed. Each subsection contained twelve elementary preservice teachers; eleven females and one male. Subsection A had two preservice teachers over thirty-four years old, while subsection B had one such student. The remaining preservice teachers included in the study were between 22 and 24 years of age. The two subsections compared were not diverse in terms of ethnicity, being comprised almost entirely of Caucasian participants. There was one Asian-American student in subsection A.

The discussion leaders were given a predetermined discussion format to follow with appropriate questions to stimulate the case discussions. Section leaders were instructed to present open-ended questions to promote explorations of the case, and to avoid giving the impression that there was any single

right way to interpret or respond to the case. The explicit goal was to promote exploration of alternative perspectives and actions. The discussions began with the whole-class group, then participants broke into smaller groups for more in-depth discussion of the case. The large group reconvened to share discussion reports from the small groups, a move designed to stimulate more discussion. Then participants returned to the smaller groups to share current or past experiences with a similar problem. Discussions, by their nature, necessarily grow out of the individual perspectives and values of the participants. This paper will analyze the differences and similarities in the preservice teachers' reactions to the discussions in their class section.

Data Collection and Analysis

Leaders were instructed to provide fifteen minutes at the end of the class period so students could write a brief reaction paper to the discussions. A common prompt was used, "Briefly note your reactions to the case/issues discussed today; describe any way in which your views or understandings of the issues raised may have changed in the course of the discussion." The papers were picked up and read by discussion leaders. A copy of each paper was made and kept for analysis. The originals were returned to the students the following class period.

Content analysis was conducted on the reaction papers of the preservice teachers in the two sections. Categories emerged during the analysis. Initial categories were established related to problems identified as factors contributing to Alston's difficulties in school. These were divided into three broad areas: 1) homosexuality as a factor; 2) teacher/school behaviors as factors; and 3) acknowledging the larger context of home, community, and society. A fourth major category of suggested teacher strategies to handle the situation in the case consisted of fourteen more specific strategies which were grouped into four broader subgroups. Group A included more teacher-directed and pre-planned strategies, such as class rules with consequences and class meetings. Strategies in group B were more student-centered and interactive,

such as the teacher being observant, supportive, praising, and establishing individual expectations. Group C included just one strategy---avoiding the problem. The final set of strategies, group D, involved administrative or support services. An additional ten initial categories of reactions focused on personal reactions to the case discussion format, and were grouped together as a fifth major category. A copy of these categories and subgroups, with sample student comments, is contained in appendix A.

Frequency counts were done for each category, as well as counts of the number of different strategies, and subgrouping of strategies (A, B, C, D) for each student. An individual response profile was developed for each preservice teacher that included demographic information, main theme, and categorical frequency counts. Responses in each category were typed into a data base by category and section to facilitate comparisons. These documents were analyzed for emergent patterns of responses, and language use.

Patterns of Response

Despite the care taken to make the sections as uniform as possible, there were differences in the reactions to the case and class discussion. Preservice teachers in section A gave greater attention to certain aspects of the case than their peers in section B. These aspects were:

1) that many interrelated factors merged in the case,
2) the impact of the community in the case,
3) the problems for teachers in environments or schools such as in the case,
4) the value of the class discussion of the case.

Preservice teaches in section B gave greater emphasis to:

1) the victim's role or blame for the situation in the case,
2) the impact and role of the family in the case problem,
3) the political realities and dilemmas in schools.

The responses from the two sections also had much in common. Both groups expressed dislike for the behavior of teachers in the case, belief in the impact a single teacher can have, resolve and hopefulness in making effective teaching decisions in their own classrooms, the tremendous impact of the

family, and the usefulness of the class exercise. However, in all but one of these areas the language they used showed some distinct differences in perspective.

Teacher/School Behavior

Compared to section A, section B had almost twice as many actual reactions which expressed opinions about the poor responses of teachers in the case. However, the language used by members of section A to describe the teachers' behaviors implied a stronger negative reaction. Preservice teachers in section B described teacher responses to the student in the case as "neglect"; "never noticed"; "slipped through"; "perceived as a waste"; "too bad"; "gave him little"; "didn't believe in him"; and "inappropriate." All of these descriptions imply sins of omission in teacher behavior that are much milder than section A's descriptions. Preservice teachers in section A used such terms as "persecution"; "abuse;" "harassed"; "bullied"; "stereotyping"; and "labeling." They used words such as "ill-at-ease"; "appalled"; "anger;" and "dismay" to describe their feelings about those teacher behaviors. These descriptions imply a much stronger reaction and a perspective viewing these teacher behaviors as sins of commission.

Another interesting difference in pattern occurred in statements about belief in the impact of a single teacher. Preservice teachers in section B mentioned only the positive impact that a teacher might make in a student's life, and 71% of them referred specifically to the student in the case or the one teacher who was positive towards him: "Alston also makes me aware of how much power I have as a teacher to turn someone's life around. By touching one student's life with extra reinforcement, I could be a Ms. Langston and help a student's career." They did not comment on the negative damage done by the other teachers in the case. Sixty-seven percent of the preservice teachers in section A, by contrast, noted that teacher impact could be either positive or negative, as indicated by this quote: "This case reinforced my feelings that teachers have such an impact on students, how one incident can change, enhance, or destroy how a child views himself or is treated by the other children." Only three of the nine responses in section

A mentioned the case in even a general sense, as having prompted their thoughts on the topic of teacher impact.

Homosexuality as a Factor

Section B participants seemed to have discussed more of the potential ethical dilemmas involved in more controversial topics such as the homosexuality in this case, as they made three times as many comments about this aspect of the case. The ethical dilemma was succinctly summarized by one student: "Should Alston be encouraged to act more like his peers? Would this be in his best interest? Or is it more important to teach his peers acceptance of others?" Others commented on the realities of attempting to address the problem: "...far be it from me to discourage Alston's homosexuality, effeminate tendencies, but any mere mention of acceptance of these characteristics could launch a REVOLT by parents"; "As a teacher, it is almost impossible to get in everything you want to teach in a day, much less take time to counsel each student"; "It seems to me that, in this case, and in most others, excepting extreme situations, there is not much that can be done about the individual's home life." Only two responses from two different people were noted in section A in this category, compared to six by five people in the other section, and both individuals in section A were emphatic in their beliefs that they should not even attempt to address this dilemma: "I do not believe the issue of homosexuality is something any teacher need open up for discussion."

In terms of the case topic of homosexuality, section B preservice teachers also made many more statements implying that the harassment was solely the problem of the student/victim in the case:

"He [Alston] sees himself as weird and worthless."

"He [Alston] needs...to learn strategies of social interaction."

"Alston became an easy target of ridicule and it just made him look more like a "sissy" because he never tried to stop it."

"they [teachers] could have developed a way for Alston to deal with the taunts."

"They ridicule him for not "fitting in" and his self-esteem suffers due to his lack of acceptance and friends."

It is important to note that four of the eight comments in this category, for this section, were made by the only male in that section. The same theme appears in one of the strategies mentioned, using the services of a school counselor. Two preservice teachers suggested that the student in the case needed counseling for his problems. One of these was the same male preservice teacher. Only one section A preservice teacher mentioned attempting to get the student to "cope" with the harassment.

Larger Context for the Case

Section B had twice as many preservice teachers commenting on the impact of the family on the problems of the student in the case. The language used also suggested some differences in perspective. Section A students used milder terms to describe parents' behaviors: "parents who seem apathetic"; "HUGE, problematic families"; "family was ambivalent." The language used by preservice teachers in section B appeared to be more negative about family influence, and they responded twice as often: "support is lacking"; "abuse...neglect"; "students...can be bringing in a bag of nasty tricks"; "family system...is as much to blame"; "his family sees him as just another problem"; "someone whom not even his own parents care to encourage or love unconditionally"; "a student's home environment has a large impact on their behavior"; and "Alston's problems seem to have begun long before the school system became involved in his life. His non-supportive, and even abusive father set the stage for his effeminate, or perhaps non-aggressive behavior. Likewise his mother's low expectations...gave him little to strive for."

Only section A preservice teachers noted the complex, interrelated factors that contributed to the student's problems in the case. One response summarized it well: "...my reaction is to how complex one child or person can be. There is not just one issue---tracking, homosexuality, or poor home life.

Everything is so interrelated. Such complexity really gives me, as an educator, a lot to consider." While the many variables or factors seemed to have been discussed in section B, the complexity and interrelatedness of these does not seem to have been as salient as it was in section A.

The role/impact of the community received only one mention by a preservice teacher in section B, and that in a very general way, "...the overall social system of our communities is as much to blame." Three section A preservice teachers noted that the size (small) of the community and its lack of diversity caused the child in the case to stand out more. Three other section A students also discussed the problems and pressures teachers might encounter in a school such as the one described in the case, a school where collegial support and professionalism were missing. This did not seem to be a discussion topic in section B, since no students expressed these concerns.

Personal Reactions to Case Discussion

Finally, there were differences in comments about the usefulness and value of the case discussion. While the number of individuals responding in this category was not vastly different in the two sections (6 in section B, 9 in section A), there were twice as many comments coded in section A as in section B. The substance of the comments also differed somewhat. Preservice teachers in section B noted that the case gave them "food for thought," "raising some interesting and problematic issues." About half of the comments by preservice teachers in section A, however, indicated a greater change in opinion or sensitivity:

> "I have to admit my eyes have been opened..."
>
> "I will definitely be more aware..."
>
> "After this discussion, my views have changed in some ways. One point specifically, is my view on classroom discussions about problems."
>
> "This will make me more sensitive to tracking and stereotyping."
>
> "The case was enlightening...I didn't necessarily consider that allowing

> certain behavior to occur, like name-calling (occasionally) was actually sending the message that I think this is okay."

The responses here may be related to potential practical influences of the case discussion. The greater indication of attitude change in section A was associated with an important difference in students' reflections on their own teaching attitudes and behaviors. Fifty-two passages generalizing to the preservice teachers' present or future practice and setting were noted in section A. Only 36 were noted in section B. In contrast, preservice teachers in section B referred to the student who was the object of the case 67 times, while those in section A referred to him only 22 times. The total cased-based passages in section A essays was just 25, while in section B essays the total was 63. In other words, preservice teachers in section A personalized the case more, moving beyond the case to its implication for their own practice, while preservice teachers in section B did not move beyond the case, but restricted their analysis to the specifics of the case.

Teacher Strategies Suggested

Section A preservice teachers suggested two strategies not mentioned by any section B preservice teachers: classroom meetings and discussions, and not calling attention to individuals with controversial problems. These categories appear to be related. Evidently, during the discussion of strategies, the idea of class meetings was brought up to deal with harassment and teasing over homosexual characteristics, but countered by some students who felt this would single the child out, invade his privacy, and cause even more damage. Two comments place qualifiers on class meetings:

> "I do think that class meetings are effective, if [my emphasis] done regularly enough so that students become comfortable expressing concerns."

> "This [discussions on controversial topics] can be done tactfully, like a general laundry list of topics, homosexuality just being one."

This caution is also evident in comments about insuring privacy by not singling out a student. Only students in section A mentioned this strategy:

> "If it [classroom meeting] is common, it won't put one student in the spotlight, as there would be instances where others would have problems."
>
> "...discussion about respecting others, so as not to call attention to the individual being bullied."
>
> "...having a classroom discussion on children calling Alston a "sissy" or "fag." This, I thought, would automatically be a good decision. However, after the discussion I feel that this might bring up issues that invade children's privacy---example in Alston's case, homosexuality."

Considering the emphasis on teacher responsibility in the factors of the case, it would be understandable that such concerns would arise. These topics did not appear in the reaction essays of the preservice teachers in section B.

Section B preservice teachers gave greater emphasis to grouping students heterogeneously or cooperatively; planning and manipulating situations to promote success, ownership and/or acceptance; developing a healthy classroom environment where students are acknowledged and praised; and establishing high, individual expectations for students. The discussion in this section seemed to focus on how to react to the child who is different or harassed in order to counteract the negative influences of family, community and peers. It makes sense that if the discussion about the case did not emphasize school and teacher responsibility for preventing harassment, that strategies to solve the problem would focus on altering the relative influence of the other negative factors promoting the situation.

Overall, fewer strategies in all, and fewer per person were noted in section A than in section B. Section A cited a total of 23 strategies, with a range of 0-5, and a mean of 1.9 strategies per person. Section B, in contrast, mentioned a total of 39 strategies mentioned, with a range of 1-7, and a mean of 3.25 strategies per person. The difference between the two sections came exclusively from differences in the number of strategies in group B, student centered strategies. Section B generated 27 group B strategies for dealing with problems identified in the case, while section A noted only nine.

The only other pattern to emerge was consistent for both sections. Those individuals who made comments on their belief in the impact of a teacher in students' lives, perhaps an indicator of idealism,

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overwhelmingly mentioned fewer strategies for coping with the situation represented in the case study. Individuals listing many possible strategies rarely made comments about teacher impact. In section B the same pattern was also evident for comments representing preservice teachers' resolve to act professionally, to do the right thing as a teacher. This pattern may suggest a negative aspect to strong, idealistic teacher beliefs about teaching that should be investigated through further research.

Summary

The pattern of responses for section A show fewer comments, but stronger language condemning unprofessional teacher behavior, the acknowledgement of the positive and negative impact of teacher behaviors, a milder response to family influence, a focus on the many complex variables involved in the case, and language suggesting greater awareness and change in the preservice teachers' attitudes. This suggests that the discussion in section A focused on teacher behaviors, both positive and negative, and the need for teachers to take professional responsibility. Students in this section cited fewer teacher strategies to address the problems in the case, but showed a greater tendency to note implications for their own practice.

The pattern in section B was different. It included milder language about teacher behavior, stronger language and more comments suggesting that unaccepted students should learn to be accepted, language mentioning only the potential positive effects of teacher behavior, concern with the political dilemmas facing teachers, negativity towards family influence, and a wait-and-see attitude toward the case topics. This pattern suggests that discussion focused upon the outside influences that impinge on students and teachers creating dilemmas and conflicts, focusing the "blame" on these factors rather than spotlighting teacher behaviors and responsibilities. Students in this section tended to restrict their analysis to the case, citing more specific teaching strategies to deal with problems identified, but giving less evidence that the case discussion had influenced their own attitudes about teaching.

Conclusions

Despite the care to keep the class sections and discussions comparable, each emphasized different facets of the case. Discussion necessarily means that each person, leader and student alike, will bring their own experiences, values, and perspectives to the topic being discussed. If any student or instructor input is allowed, then no amount of planning can insure a pre-determined effect (McAninch, 1993) or uniformity of responses between sections of the same course. Insuring active student involvement and reflection also insures diversity and unique combinations for each class section.

Each section in this study emphasized different factors involved in the case during their discussions. While there was variability of responses within each section, essays from section A, as a group, exhibited greater generalization from the case study to the preservice teachers' practice and their field experiences, a greater focus on teacher behaviors and their effect, and evidence of more changes in attitude. Essays from section B, overall, showed a greater emphasis on possible causes of the case problem, a tendency not to generalize beyond the case to either principles of practice or their own field experiences, and less evidence of a change in attitude. While school counselors and the resource they represent were discussed in both sections, elementary preservice teachers in section B translated this information into specific classroom strategies for teachers more than did those in section A.

Smaller discussion groups provide a greater opportunity for students to relate their personal experiences and perspectives in the discussion (Morine-Dershimer, 1993). If case analysis and discussion encourages connections to preservice teachers' own experiences and acts as a concrete manipulative to aid understanding, as Shulman (1993) suggests, then variation in response would be expected despite common procedures, since students will bring their own experiences, values, and perspectives to the topic being discussed. This expectation is confirmed in this study by the presence of very different responses from individuals within each section.

Common procedures for case discussions also did not promote common outcomes across

discussion sections in this study, which suggests that factors other than common procedures must account for the differences found between the two sections. One of the few differences between the two sections was that they were led by graduate students of different genders. Section A was led by females, while section B was led by males. Since most of the preservice teachers were female, the interaction of the case topic, male homosexuality, and the discussion leaders' gender may have been a significant factor in the degree of personalized generalization to principles of practice versus the focus on the individual case problem and solution found in the essays. Dana and Floyd (1993) and Shulman (1992) found that sensitive issues such as race can cause discomfort and tension in case discussions. The same situation may have occurred in this context. Gender differences of the leaders may also have affected the direction of the discussion as well as interacting with the topic. Some researchers have noted a difference between the style and emphases of males and females, especially in a leadership capacity (Gilligan, 1982; Leithwood & Steinbach, 1995; Noddings, 1984; Shakeshaft, 1987).

Another factor that may have affected the discussion was the different proportions of students by program area. Section B included several secondary preservice teachers, whereas section A did not. There have been some studies showing a difference between the perspectives of elementary and secondary teachers (Brousseau, Book, & Beyers, 1987; Kagan & Tippin, 1991). A study currently underway is designed to examine these two potentially influential factors further. Four class sections taught by two teams of instructors discussed the case of Alston and wrote reaction papers. Each team of instructors taught two class sections. One section was made up of elementary and special education students, and the other consisted of all secondary education students. Reaction papers are being analyzed to identify similarities and differences in patterns of response associated with discussion leaders as compared with student make-up of the discussion section.

Several additional data collection procedures might be helpful in future studies. A videotape or audiotape of the respective discussions could have provided some additional information as to which

individuals most influenced the direction of the discussion, and the tone those discussions took. Reflections from discussion leaders could provide important information about the development of the discussion, and general response of the participants, as well as insights into their own perspectives, and the potential influence of these perspectives on the discussions.

Identifying factors influencing differences in reactions to case discussions continues to be a critical issue for research on case-based teaching. If an important intended outcome of case analysis is to promote connections among various representations of experience (cases, principles of practice, and actual classroom practice), as Shulman (1993) suggests, then teacher educators need to know what processes and procedures contribute to development of such connections. Systematic attention to possible factors of influence is an essential feature of needed research in this area.

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APPENDIX A

CATEGORIES AND SAMPLE COMMENTS

I. HOMOSEXUALITY AS A FACTOR

Avoidance/denial of issue, homosexuality was not the main point.
- "Alston's homosexuality was not the biggest issue here."
- "In a very general sense I believe that the two major issues at hand are ones of self-esteem based on socialization and self-esteem based on the expectations of others."

Blame the victim.
- "Alston is different from his peers...they ridicule him for not 'fitting in'"
- "He [Alston] needs to be more aware of himself and become more self-confident"

Case is negative.
- "The strongest feeling I had about the case was that it portrayed homosexuality very negatively, almost equating homosexuality with social misfit."

Explanation/rationalization of behavior.
- "I can understand why his classmates acted the way they did, although I don't agree with their actions. Sometimes people act out of ignorance or out of fear of being ostracized by the group. I believe some of the kids may have 'gone along' with the others in bullying Alston because they feared that they would be called names."
- "...because he had no desire to be like any of the males he ever knew. He instead, went to the other extreme in order to be different from all the males in his life."

II. TEACHER/SCHOOL BEHAVIOR FACTORS

Shock, dismay, condemnation at teacher and administrator behaviors in the case study.
- "It is a crime that only one of Alston's teachers noticed his isolation and potential."
- "Another thing I thought about was how could the teachers expect for the other children to end their stereotypes/prejudices about Alston when they modeled those behaviors themselves?"
- "I feel that, yes, Alston slipped through the system."

Belief in the impact of a single teacher.
- "It also made me think more about the importance of self-concept and how much a teacher can do to hurt or help it."
- "This case also demonstrates how we, as teachers, affect children not only academically, but personally also.

Responsibility/resolve to not allow the same thing to happen in their class.
- "If each of us here in this room follows through with the suggestions we have made as a group, and sticks by the principles we profess, we can hope for a lot of students' lives to be touched in a positive way."
- "...and like Marianne said, don't let it happen in your classroom. That is a more powerful message than any discussion of issues could ever be."

Difficulties for teachers in situations such as Alston's school to behave against the norms of their colleagues.
- "Also, the comment about what would I do if this type of thing was the norm in the school that I worked in: It's not something I think of often, but I think I would have an extremely difficult time knowing such practices were going on around me."
- "I feel that they close the door before the students get in. And it's really hard to work in this environment. I wonder whether I feel this conflict because I am so idealistic and young in this profession."

Dealing with such problems as homosexuality is not the teacher's responsibility; Teachers cannot do everything.
- "Personally, I disagree with homosexuality, but I don't think its my job to make judgments about things like that."
- "Teachers would have to sacrifice time for the other twenty children in a class in order to give Alston enough."

Justification of teacher/school response.
- "However, I find myself wondering if this really could have been combatted with the way the system is."
- "...there are certain areas of the students' lives that a teacher cannot 'fix'..."

Reflections on own teaching attitudes and behavior.
- "It definitely made me go over in my mind if there are any things that I may have said that could hurt a sensitive student."
- "I felt involved...because I am teaching a student who seems to be very similar to Alston...Joe has become an involved participating member of our classroom, whereas he had not been before."

III. LARGER CONTEXT FOR THE CASE

Acknowledgement of the contribution of the home situation to Alston's problems.
- "Alston's problems seem to have begun long before the school system became involved in his life."
- "His family...was abusive. Things like this most certainly affect a child socially, emotionally, and psychologically."
- "...abused by the hands of everyone with whom he had contact [family] during his childhood. Abuse equals neglect, Alston suffered from plain old neglect."

Issue is complex with many interrelated factors.
- "...as we've discussed, there are a lot of issues linked together in this case."
- "It seems that so many overlapping issues were discussed, that I now find myself with mixed reactions.

I feel different ways depending on the issue."
- "I feel that there were several problems to consider. I realize that there are so many variables that shape children..."

Type of community, values of community, and context are important variables.
- "I think Alston also stood out to his peers so much because he wasn't in a diverse community."
- "Sometimes children take on the attitudes of their parents or others around them and in such a small community as Alston's, where being different in some ways was considered strange, I'm not surprised by the kids' reactions toward Alston."
- "...the overall social system of our communities are as much to blame."

Acknowledgement of the prevalence of prejudice and discrimination in society and schools.
- "It is unfortunate that people, like the people in the article, hold prejudices against others who are different from them or who do things differently than what they are accustomed to."
- "The case could really happen easily in a classroom."
- "Even his teachers may in some way harbor some disdain for Alston due to his 'social inappropriateness.'"

IV. TEACHER STRATEGIES SUGGESTED:

GROUP A - TEACHER DIRECTED

Teachers should model appropriate behaviors of respect, acceptance of diversity and differences as role models.
- "...which suggests I be very careful in my choice of words and possible pitfalls to seemingly innocent statements, which may lead to labeling."
- "For example, diversity would be a theme in my classroom. I would try to teach students to accept that they all have different strengths..."
- "In terms of socialization responsibilities, the teacher must model appropriate behavior..."

Teachers should establish rules that prohibit name-calling and harassment, and promote respect. Back these up with consequences.
- "I believe that teachers should establish classroom rules of accepting differences in other people. Teachers should also set standards which prohibit negative behavior."

Class meetings/discussions on problems and appropriate behavior.
- "put an end to it....perhaps through an open, full class discussion about respecting others..."

No tracking, heterogeneous and cooperative teams.
- "One specific approach I would use would be cooperative groups..."
- "I would not track my students..."

GROUP B - STUDENT-CENTERED

Be observant and perceptive of student interactions---know what is going on.
- "I would hope that I, as a teacher, would be able to pick up on this behavior and put an end to it somehow..."
- "...but she [the teacher] must be aware and do what is in her power."
- "As teachers though, we can instill a sense of responsibility in our students to challenge themselves and we can promote the self-esteem necessary..."

Give students ownership of behavior. Set-up situations where students can succeed.
- "...he needs ...chances to succeed in the classroom."
- "I feel as though teachers can place the less accepted students in leadership roles, can show them their worth..."

Be supportive of students, validate identity, praise. Establish a healthy classroom environment.
- "I will have to be careful and maintain a healthy environment in my classroom, one in which the students will grow.. "
- "I would try to motivate Alston with positive reinforcement and let him know that I believed in him as a person first, and then a student."
- "In our classrooms, we must work to promote an atmosphere where every child is made to feel important."

Examine own attitudes, be open, more sensitive, willing to apologize for mistakes. Don't prejudge students.
- "I realize I will probably make mistakes, but I will apologize for those mistakes, and learn from them and try not to make the same mistake twice."
- "I hope I'll have the insight and sensitivity and energy to prevent such a disservice."
- "If I had been his teacher I would have not listened to past evidence."

Establish and maintain reasonable, yet high individualized expectations; Look for strengths, develop talents.
- "We just must realize that "the best" will differ from student to student."
- "...my CI and I may be the only people who've ever clearly established high expectations for X."
- "These assignments would be more open and individualized in evaluation. In this way, Alston's strengths might be realized--his imagination given opportunities to come forth..."

Never use forced or public apologies to embarrass students whether victim or harasser.
- "I also would not have pulled him out in front of everyone and told him he was in the lower group.

GROUP C - AVOIDANCE

Avoid problematic, controversial topics; don't attract attention to those who are different.
- "Being sensitive can mean allowing privacy, but..."
- "...discussion about respecting others, so as not to call attention to the individual being bullied."

GROUP D - USE OF SCHOOL SERVICES

Refer to counselor, speak to administrator, seek other help.
- "I believe the suggestion of school counselor, or even asking a supervisor is a sound one."
- "First and foremost, I believe that Alston could have used the constant support of a school counselor or psychologist..."

Use sex education to raise consciousness on the issue.
- "Sex education is an appropriate lesson in school---homosexuality could be discussed during such a time. That would raise consciousness."

Tracking
- "I don't think the right environment is always heterogeneous."
- "Like I said, kids like to compete with classmates, but if they feel they'll never 'win' because their best doesn't match other students' best, then they'll shut down."

V. PERSONAL REACTIONS TO CASE DISCUSSION

Value of case and discussion in promoting thought and/or sensitivity.
- "...but most importantly I feel that simply raising these issues has made me more aware of what my viewpoints are exactly. In addition, hearing other various opinions allowed me to approach these hypothetical situations from different perspectives."
- "In general, I found this case to bring up many valid points. The first was quite a lesson in teacher expectations."

Value of case and discussion in providing ideas, strategies to handle.
- "I was reminded of some additional ways to intervene if teasing occurs..."
- "The class has given me a chance to brainstorm for more ideas to reach students like Joe."
- "I wish I had this resource now (or would have it as a 'real' teacher) to brainstorm alternative actions for problems that arise in my teaching/classroom."

Benefit of format.
- "The format of the discussion helped me to learn a lot...because when I felt stumped there were so many others."

Confusion about case.
- "My initial reaction to the case was confusion. I guess I read this like a 'college' reading assignment and I tried to find the main point. But I couldn't find a main point..."
- "In this case, it appears that neither issue was addressed [encouraging Alston to act more like peers, or teaching peers to accept others who are different]."

Disappointment, and/or disagreement over class's reaction to topic and case.
- "I was extremely shocked that homosexuality came out in a case study like this."
- "One issue that I feel differently about than that which was discussed in class was the role of Ms. Langston."

Views not changed.
- "I don't know that my own personal opinion have changed necessarily..."
- "I really didn't experience any change of emotion or attitude due to our class discussion."

Other
- "Should Alston be encouraged to act more like his peers? Would this be in his best interest? Or is it more important to teach his peers acceptance of others?"

Sympathy for Alston
- "I think, in the whole, my reaction was very sympathetic regardless of the main point I was trying to find."
- "My first reaction to Alston's plight was probably shared by the whole class...sadness."